

~~SF~~
~~VC 58~~
~~#32~~

LIBRARY COPY
SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

THE HAIGHT ASHBURY

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PAST

PROPERTY OF THE
SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING
100 LARKIN STREET, SAN FRANCISCO, CA. 94102

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

EF
79.461
a5296h



DOCUMENTS

SAN FRANCISCO
PUBLIC LIBRARY

REFERENCE
BOOK

Not to be taken from the Library

5/S

THE HAIGHT-ASHBURY - A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PAST

Early Settlement and Development

Prior to 1870, the area presently referred to as the Haight-Ashbury (roughly, Seventeenth Street to Fulton and Golden Gate Park to Buena Vista Park and Baker Street) was a rural area rather than the geographical center of a thriving urban metropolis. Topographically defined by the slopes of Lone Mountain on the north, Buena Vista Heights and Mt. Olympus on the east, the foothills of Twin Peaks on the south, and the slopes of Mt. Sutro on the southwest, the area was part of the land granted by the Mexican government in 1845 to Jose de Jesus Noe, Alcalde (chief administrator) of the town then known as Yerba Buena.

The Gold Rush of 1849 attracted adventurers from a great many countries and thus initiated the development of San Francisco into one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan cities in the world. During the next 20 years hundreds of fortunes were made and lost in mining, banking, trade, and land speculation. In the midst of all the booms and busts, the city gradually began to spread beyond its original quadrangle bounded on the west by Larkin Street. This expansion was slowed, however, by the extensive reaches of sand dunes encountered throughout much of the area west of Divisadero Street. The present-day Richmond and Sunset districts, for example, were vast areas of shifting sand during most of the 19th century.

The Pope Valley section of the present-day Haight-Ashbury (the less hilly lands south of the Panhandle) was the first area,

Early Settlement and Development

Prior to 1810, the area presently referred to as the Haight-Ashbury (roughly, between Street to Union and Golden Gate Park to Union Street) was a rural area rather than the geographical center of a thriving urban metropolis. Topographically defined by the slopes of Lone Mountain on the north, Union Street and the slopes of Mt. Diabolo on the south, the foothills of Twin Peaks on the east, and the slopes of Mt. Diabolo on the southwest, the area was part of the land granted by the Mexican government in 1845 to Jose de Jesus Noe, Alcalde (chief administrator) of the town then known as Yerba Buena.

The Gold Rush of 1849 attracted adventurers from a great many countries and thus initiated the development of San Francisco into one of the most important cities in the world.

D REF 979.461 5a5296h

San Francisco (Calif.).
Dept. of City Planning.
The Haight Ashbury; a
brief description of
1971?

of all the boom and bust, the city gradually began to spread beyond its original geographic bounds on the west by Latin Street. This expansion was slowed, however, by the extensive tracts of sand dunes encountered throughout much of the area west of Divisadero Street. The present-day Richmond and Sunset districts, for example, were vast areas of shifting sand during most of the 19th century.

The Pope Valley section of the present-day Haight-Ashbury (the left half) south of the Pacheco was the first area.

moving east from the ocean, that did not have to contend with this problem. It was characterized instead by stable soil, trees, rocks, and small springs. Even so, the first family did not settle there until 1870 when F. M. Lange bought a nine-acre ranch and built a home along what is now Cole Street near Grattan.

During the same year, Governor Henry Haight appointed the first San Francisco Park Commission and thus formed the institutional base to proceed with the development of Golden Gate Park. Public pressure for a large recreation ground in San Francisco had been mounting throughout the 1860's, an idea long championed by Supervisors Monroe Ashbury and Charles Stanyan. It took years to overcome the problems of inadequate fresh water and shifting sands. Eventually this was accomplished, however, and Golden Gate Park, along with the natural expansion of the city to the west, transformed the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood into a node of social and commercial activity.

In 1883, the first cable car line was opened along Haight Street. The McAllister, Hayes and Oak Street lines soon followed, and all terminated at Stanyan Street to service the park. The Park & Ocean Railroad was also constructed at this time and ran from Stanyan to Lincoln and out to the beach. This increasingly elaborate transportation network had a major impact on the area. Everything converged on Haight and Stanyan where there were separate car barns for the Haight Street line and Park & Ocean Railroad as well as turntables for the Haight and Oak Street lines. The principal pedestrian entrance to the park was located at Haight and Stanyan.

This simultaneous development of the park and the street-car system stimulated building, increased property values, and made the Haight a center of social activity for the entire city. It was not at all unusual to see thousands of people swarming to the park on weekends. An amusement center was operating at Haight and Cole. Bars, bike shops, hotels, restaurants, a livery stable, and numerous other services sprang up along Stanyan. Property along the eastern boundary of the park which went for \$25 to \$50 a front foot in the early 1880's was up to \$125 to \$250 a front foot in 1891.

The period from 1880 - 1910 saw considerable residential expansion in the flatter areas. This is still evident today in the concentration of architectural styles characteristic of that time -- a variety of large wooden buildings with elaborately detailed facades, pillars, turrets, domes, and stained glass windows. During this period, the Haight became a mix of middle class and upper middle class residents. The upper middle class, comprised largely of business and professional interests, lent an air of exclusiveness to the neighborhood as certain of its members tried to outdo the impressive mansions built on Nob Hill by the railroad tycoons and other elite members of San Francisco society.

Accelerated Growth of the Western Sector

The earthquake and fire of 1906 led to a massive migration of former downtown residents to the western reaches of the city. This ushered in a commercial and residential building boom in

This simultaneous development of the park and the street-car system stimulated building, increased property values, and made the Haight a center of social activity for the entire city. It was not at all unusual to see thousands of people swimming in the park on weekends. An amusement center was operating at Haight and Cole. Bars, bike shops, hotels, restaurants, a lively stable, and numerous other services sprang up along Stanyan. Property along the eastern boundary of the park which went for \$25 to \$50 a front foot in the early 1880's was up to \$125 to \$250 a front foot in 1891.

The period from 1880 - 1910 saw considerable residential expansion in the Haight area. This is still evident today in the concentration of large, single-story houses characteristic of that time -- a variety of large buildings with elaborately detailed facades, pillars, turrets, domes, and stained glass windows. During this period, the Haight became a mix of middle class and upper middle class residents. The upper middle class comprised largely of business and professional interests, lent an air of exclusiveness to the neighborhood as certain of its members tried to outdo the impressive mansions built on Nob Hill by the railroad tycoons and other elite members of San Francisco society.

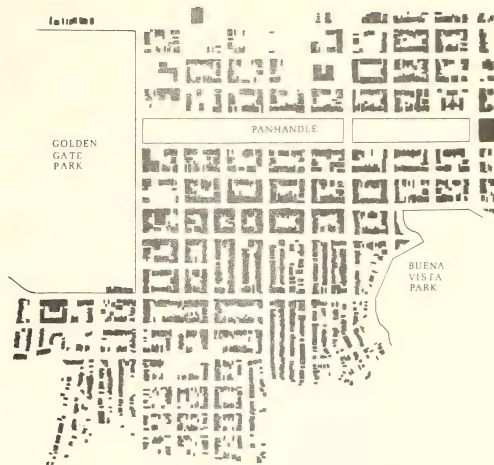
Accelerated Growth of the Western Sector

The earthquake and fire of 1906 led to a massive migration of former downtown residents to the western reaches of the city. This resulted in a commercial and residential building boom in the

the western sector which lasted for nearly six years until the downtown areas could be reconstructed. In fact, the Fillmore district temporarily became San Francisco's principal business center during this period. The post-earthquake boom also increased the economic and ethnic diversity of the Haight-Ashbury community. A number of multi-unit apartment buildings and flats were constructed while some of the original single family homes were subdivided to accommodate the new demand for housing. Although the population continued to concentrate in the valley, it began to gradually push up the slopes of Parnassus Heights and out over the sand dunes toward the ocean. The attached map shows the level of development in the Haight-Ashbury in terms of buildings constructed as of 1919 compared to 1970. It clearly demonstrates the heavy concentration of growth in the district prior to 1920.

As previously discussed, the early development of the Haight-Ashbury was closely tied to the creation of Golden Gate Park and the growth of the city's transportation network. As long as the park remained a well-utilized regional center, and as long as San Franciscans relied heavily on the public transportation routes that converged on the eastern border of the park along Stanyan, the continued prosperity of the Haight-Ashbury was fairly secure. A third advantage enjoyed by businessmen in the area was the absence of rival commercial centers in the immediate vicinity of the park. The first building in what is now the Irving Street commercial strip was constructed in 1893 at the time of the Mid-Winter Fair. The

1919 DEVELOPMENT



1970 DEVELOPMENT



growth of this potential rival proceeded slowly, however, and by 1910 the Sunset district was still very sparsely populated.

Although the Fillmore district in the Western Addition declined rather abruptly following the resurgence of the downtown areas leveled by the earthquake and fire, the Haight-Ashbury, with its wider base of commercial support, experienced continued prosperity. A measure of the vitality of the district was the decision in 1912 to increase the number of streetcars on Haight Street from 30 cars per hour to 41 cars per hour. By the 1920's, residents were bragging about the unique educational, cultural and recreational opportunities in the area. There were, for example, Grattan and Dudley Stone elementary schools, Poly High and Lowell High (then located at Masonic and Hayes), the University of San Francisco, and the three hospitals (U.C. Medical Center, St. Mary's, and Harkness). In addition, several theaters could be found in the neighborhood -- including the present Haight Theater. Kezar Stadium was completed in 1925 and used chiefly for football games involving San Francisco's high schools and the Bay Area's Catholic universities.

While prosperity continued during the 1920's, the amount of new construction in the Haight-Ashbury fell sharply. This was not true of the Sunset district, however, where the population swelled from 15,000 in 1920 to 35,000 in 1930. The completion and naming of the Sunset Tunnel in 1928 suggests the increasing importance of this area. The migration to the Sunset carried with it the appearance of rival commercial

centers ready to serve visitors to the park as well as residents in and around the Haight. Nevertheless, Irving Street remained the only serious competitor until the late 1930's.

The Depression - A Different Course is Established

The Depression marked a major turning point in the history of the Haight-Ashbury. Economic conditions during this period forced many families to double up in what previously had been single family dwellings. The housing vacancy rate soared during the 1930's as more and more San Franciscans found themselves unable to afford their own homes. The general shortage of funds also had a serious adverse effect on the maintenance of buildings. It was not unusual, for example, for rent levels to be cut in half during these years. Both of these developments contributed to an accelerated deterioration of the housing stock. The roominess of the original single family dwellings and even of the multiple dwellings in the Haight-Ashbury, particularly in the level areas around the Panhandle, made the neighborhood attractive to families forced to share their living quarters. A Real Property Survey of San Francisco carried out by the Works Project Administration in 1939 showed a significant -- though not yet alarming -- deterioration of property in the neighborhood. This was particularly true of the area between Waller and Oak where the number of substandard units surpassed 15 percent of the total. The same survey also indicated a community characterized by absentee ownership and a heavy concentration of tenants. Single family dwellings, for

example, represented only 10 percent of all houses in the entire Haight-Ashbury neighborhood at the time.

World War II

Housing pressure brought about by World War II furthered the trend toward deterioration in the Haight-Ashbury. The massive influx of servicemen and war workers into San Francisco along with the almost total orientation of the economy towards the war effort created a very severe housing shortage throughout the city. Many of the old mansions and spacious flats still characteristic of the Haight were subdivided into as many as six or seven separate units. Maintenance was limited by the scarcity of available services in a war-oriented economy rather than by a shortage of funds as was the case during the Depression. An added problem contributing to poor maintenance was the extremely rapid rate of tenant turnover.

The extent of the subdivision of existing buildings into smaller units during the Depression and war years is particularly impressive. Available data shows that, while the total number of buildings remained relatively stable, the number of dwelling units went from 4750 in 1919 to 8040 in 1940 and 8770 in 1950 (an overall increase of 85 percent). No other statistic better documents the changes that occurred within the district during the period.

Some of the older residents, observing the growing blight, began to move away, and the entry of minority groups gathered momentum, particularly during the 1950's. By 1960, the social

and economic composition of the neighborhood was noticeably different from that prevailing after the war in both the flatlands around the Panhandle and in the Upper Ashbury. In 1950, for example, two percent of the population in this area was Negro while in 1960 the figure had risen to 16 percent. The income levels among the people living near the Panhandle had long been below the citywide average, but by 1960 the same could be said of the average resident in the Upper Ashbury. The trend continued into the 1960's as an increasing number of low-income families and individuals who could not afford to live elsewhere gravitated toward the Haight. In the late 1950's and early 1960's large numbers of "beatniks" left North Beach (in part as a result of high rents) and settled along the Panhandle and in sections of Ashbury Heights where lower rents and a tolerance for cultural diversity prevailed.

Several other developments brought about major changes in the Haight-Ashbury community. One was the diminishing role of the Haight as a service center for users of Golden Gate Park. The continued development of the Sunset and Richmond districts further drained away some of the trade associated with the park. The advent of the automobile (which really got underway in the late 1940's following the conversion of steel production from wartime to peacetime use) not only made the Sunset and Richmond more accessible but greatly reduced the importance of the main pedestrian entrance at Haight and Stanyan as well. Reliance on the streetcar system that passed through many parts of the neighborhood had reached its peak during the war and immediately

after. Following this period, however, visitors increasingly began to use the many vehicle entrances to the park which were not as advantageously located from the point of view of people doing business in the Haight-Ashbury.

The rise of rival commercial centers associated with both the automobile and the city's natural expansion cut deeply into more than just the park-associated trade enjoyed by the Haight. The mass introduction of the automobile, in particular, drastically changed shopping patterns as people were able to travel longer distances at no great inconvenience in order to buy what they wanted. The resultant changes in merchandising (toward low prices and volume sales) worked against the small merchants in the Haight. By the 1950's, many of the buildings along Haight Street appeared increasingly obsolete due in part to physical deterioration and in part to the limited floor space in the old, narrow structures which was inadequate for the needs of modern merchandisers. An added problem was the lack of off-street parking or truck loading facilities along Haight Street. A description of the area in a report prepared by the San Francisco Department of City Planning in 1956 reflects the changes that were taking place. The commercial district is presented as "a typical community business district dealing in personal services (twice as many as any other business), food stores and sundry incidental goods ... some shops are in poor condition and 8 percent are vacant." Not a bad picture, necessarily, but a far cry from descriptions of the Haight during

the days when it shared the spotlight with Golden Gate Park as a focal point of regional activity.

The 1960's - Prelude to the Present

The lower rents which accompanied the deterioration of the housing stock, the commercial decline, and the decreasing relative importance of the Haight-Ashbury within the city as a whole helped create some of the conditions that contributed to the two major social developments of the 1960's. One was the growing influx of low-income minorities -- particularly Negroes displaced from the two redevelopment areas in the Western Addition and moving over from the Haight-Fillmore. The other was the emergence of the Haight-Ashbury as the national center for the hippie movement.

The hippie culture evolved in part out of the beatnik community that had transferred to the Haight from North Beach in the late 1950's and early 1960's. Great impetus was given the movement when Allan Ginsberg and Ken Kesey made their appearance in 1964 and Ginsberg declared the hippies the "new seekers". The rise of the area to a position of national prominence was aided considerably by the extensive coverage given it by the mass media. The peak was reached in the summer of 1967 when tens of thousands filed through the area during a period of only three months.

For a few short years, the hippie boom generated a resurgence of commercial activity along Haight Street. The composition of goods and services changed drastically, however, as a

number of stores sprang up in response to the heavy tourist trade created by curious observers from the outside. Once the hippie era began to fade, many of the businesses that had come to rely almost exclusively on tourism were either forced out of business or had to adjust to a significant drop in sales. In this sense, the long-standing commercial decline in the neighborhood was actually hastened by the events of the mid-1960's. The massive influx of people during this period was also attended by a severe housing shortage, the subsequent acceleration in the deterioration of the housing stock, and serious health problems -- particularly those associated with drug abuse.

Another major social development of the 1960's was the entry of large numbers of low-income blacks, especially in the flatlands around the Panhandle. According to the 1960 Census, for example, the proportion of Negroes to the total population in the area between Waller, Stanyan, Oak, and Baker was 17 percent (3 percent in 1950). Although data from the 1970 Census are not yet available, it seems likely that the number has increased to significantly more than 50 percent during the past ten years. Whether or not this trend continues, the presence of an already large block of low-income residents means that the conditions and needs thus created (employment, low-cost housing, different demands for goods and services, etc.) must be taken into consideration over the years ahead.

The Haight-Ashbury Today

Thus, the Haight-Ashbury has changed substantially over the years. The important questions now concern what directions might be open to the neighborhood in the course of its future development. Many of the factors that contributed heavily to prosperity in the past cannot be depended upon to the same extent to spur future growth (the regional status once enjoyed as a result of its special relation to Golden Gate Park, the extensive reliance on public transportation, and the relative absence of competing commercial centers in the immediate area, for example). On the other hand, advantage can be taken of a number of positive features still enjoyed. The presence of two major parks and other open spaces, its cultural and physical diversity, and a convenient central location are all the makings of a highly desirable residential community.

One unique feature of the area has long been its proximity to such major institutions as the U.C. Medical Center, University of San Francisco, Harkness Hospital and Medical Center and St. Mary's Hospital and Medical Center. While these institutions have played a role in the area's development for some time, their influence may well increase considerably in the years ahead. The high rate of growth projected during the next ten years alone (U.C. Medical Center, for example, expects its student-faculty population to increase by at least 5,000 during this period) has major implications in terms of the physical effects of the expansion of facilities, the need for student and faculty housing plus hotel space to handle the sizable

number of visitors, the increased demand for commercial goods and services, and the potential extension in the number and kind of constructive community activities undertaken by each organization.

A number of other questions should be asked about the future of the Haight-Ashbury. Can the daily needs of the immediate community provide enough demand to sufficiently support the commercial zones that once served a substantial number of customers coming from outside areas, or can the Haight again attract residents from these areas? Can the physical deterioration of buildings be arrested? How can the Haight fully adjust to the new composition of its residents -- allowing its diverse human elements to interact successfully and beneficially in the parks and schools, for example?

It is clear from an examination of these issues that the Haight-Ashbury community confronts a complex situation which includes both problems and opportunities. Simply stated, the trend toward decline could be reversed or continued, depending, in large part, upon the actions of the residents, the City, and other parties involved in the neighborhood. The diverse segments of the population residing in the Haight-Ashbury, while sometimes divided with regard to method, are clearly determined to improve the conditions of life in their community and will not be easily swayed by the many difficulties likely to be encountered. The Mayor has appointed a committee to advise him of the problems existing in the Haight and the means of overcoming these problems in a manner consistent with the needs and

desires of the people living there. An application has been submitted to the Federal Government for a \$3.4 million FACE (Federally Assisted Code Enforcement) program that would rehabilitate more than 1,300 residential buildings and arrest or prevent the physical deterioration of a large section of the neighborhood. In addition, the City Planning Department has committed itself to the preparation of a comprehensive development plan for the Haight-Ashbury area. This plan will be prepared with residents of the community and will be an action proposal geared toward implementation. It will then be presented to the City Planning Commission for incorporation into the City's Master Plan. There are, then, in the midst of all the problems, a number of encouraging signs that the determination and ability exists to effectively confront these issues and implement programs which will stimulate and sustain the improvement of the neighborhood for the benefit of the diverse population which lives there.

LIBRARY COPY
SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

